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SUBJECT: KRISAN CAMP SHOWING SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT

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¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Morale at Krisan Refugee Camp has improved considerably since the previous Embassy visit eight months ago. While refugees exhibited renewed confidence in UNHCR and have apparently repudiated the camp's violent past, some problems with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), lighting, and potable water remain. The camp's 350 Liberian refugees (out of a total camp population of nearly 1,700) remain resistant to the notion of repatriation and will require further persuasion before they will budge. Meanwhile, cognizant that UNHCR will be evaluating hundreds of refugee cases for possible resettlement in August, refugees are on their best behavior. End Summary.

Krisan's Violent Past

¶12. (U) The once obscure Krisan Refugee Camp, located in southwestern Ghana, made headlines when in November 2005 angry refugees burned two buildings and one UNHCR vehicle (reftels). During their short visit to the camp one month later, the two West Africa-based Ref Coords learned that refugees were angry about living conditions, the imposition of income-generating activities, inordinate delays in resettlement activity, and the disproportionate reaction of the Ghanaian police in responding to the arson. Unfortunately, their visit was cut short when policemen carrying automatic weapons escorted them to the regional police headquarters, where they were detained for one hour before being released unharmed. It was against this backdrop that UNHCR officials, Ref Coords, and GOL officials visited Krisan in July.

From Isolation to Focused Attention

¶13. (SBU) The first team to arrive during the week of July 10 was a delegation from UNHCR with the express purpose of reconstituting the neighborhood watch team and the refugee welfare council. UNHCR Representative Aida Haile Mariam told Ref Coord that the voting for council representatives signaled a repudiation of the camp's violent past. The election of a solid slate of moderates to the council indicated to her that the majority of camp residents were no longer intimidated by radical elements and were willing to work constructively with UNHCR. The arrival three months ago of a UNV, whose sole responsibility was the 1,700 residents of Krisan Camp, also helped to restore the once-fractured relationship between UNHCR and refugees.

¶14. (SBU) Ref Coords from Abidjan and Accra toured the camp on July 12, noting immediately the elimination of the two

armed checkpoints that once guarded the camp entrance. The smiling faces of the freshly uniformed neighborhood watch committee supplanted the negative images from their previous visit in December, when refugees were either seething with rage or cowering in fear. Refugees commented favorably on the resumption of regular UNHCR visits to the camp, following a six-month hiatus from October 2005 to April of this year.

A Baby Boom Possibly Related to SGBV

¶15. (SBU) Employees at the NGO-run clinic cautioned that while things had improved, life in the camp was still not a bed of roses. One Liberian nurse (protect) claimed that a Ghanaian night guard had attempted to assault her sexually two months ago, but she had been able to escape unharmed. The nursing staff said that virtually every girl aged 15-17 was now pregnant, a phenomenon they had not observed prior to the arrival of Ghanaian police on November 8, 2005. The fact that no one had complained at the clinic may have been an indication that money had been exchanged, according to one nurse. (While their numbers have increased, only about one-sixth of Krisan teens are currently pregnant.) Furthermore, several refugees and camp employees who had shared their concerns with Ref Coords last December (including the head nurse) had been threatened.

Sour Relations with Local Villagers

¶16. (SBU) Relations with the local populace were still described as distant. Refugees believed they were over-

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charged when buying supplies at the market and under-paid when working as fishermen's assistants. In addition, refugee children who attended the local elementary school together with those from nearby Ghanaian villages reported cases of non-violent taunting. Refugees acknowledged that some villagers may be resentful because of the myriad benefits that camp residents received.

The Slow Pace of Ghanaian Justice

¶17. (SBU) The legal cases of the suspected arsonists responsible for burning two buildings and one UNHCR vehicle last November were still pending. One refugee complained that he had been summoned to court 13 times for repetitive questioning, but the judge failed to appear on 5 of those occasions. To pay for the \$8 round-trip bus fare to the court in Takoradi, some refugees had sold their food rations.

No Lighting at Night

¶18. (U) Lighting remains a problem in the camp; the National Catholic Secretariat ran a diesel generator only from 7 to 11 p.m., after which the camp was plunged into total blackness. Besides the dangers of SGBV under these circumstances, alligators and boas were known to roam the camp during the darkest hours. UNHCR has proposed connecting Krisan Camp to Ghana's electrical grid but said it lacked funding to purchase a \$10,000 transformer.

Vocational Training

¶19. (U) Refugees were concerned about vocational training

and income-generating projects. One woman commented that she had nine years' worth of certificates of her walls for all the various training programs she had successfully completed, but the poverty of the surrounding villages meant that she had never earned a dime. Undaunted, some refugees operated small shops within the camp, while at least one man was observed building cane furniture.

Resettlement - Finally?

¶10. (SBU) The prospects for resettlement appeared brighter than ever, with UNHCR's long-awaited "socio-economic survey" re-scheduled for the period July 24 to August 11. The Accra Branch Office had at its disposal two ICMC contractors, one Durable Solutions Officer, plus additional expatriate staff on loan from the resettlement hub. At the same time, UNHCR is facing reduced pressure from the GOG to resettle the Sudanese, whom the new Minister of Interior no longer considers a "security threat," according to GOG contacts and UNHCR. UNHCR has been transparent with refugees in emphasizing that it will consider resettlement across a broad range of nationalities to avoid the appearance of favoritism.

Repatriation? Never!

¶11. (SBU) Capping off an eventful week at Krisan, a delegation of Liberian government officials, including the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Executive Director of the Liberian Refugee Commission, and the Deputy Commissioner of Immigration, visited the Camp on July 14 to encourage its 350 Liberian residents to consider returning home. This was Krisan's first exposure to promotional repatriation, since UNHCR had concentrated its efforts up to now on the much larger Liberian population in Budumburam Camp. GOL officials told Ref Coord afterward that the reception by refugees was hostile. One Krisan resident asked pointedly how a GOL employee flanked continually by bodyguards could assure refugees that Monrovia was safe. Others, citing various bank robberies that have taken place in Liberia's capital city, accused the delegation of lying to them about the security situation.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) Most Krisan refugees agreed that morale, if not infrastructure, had improved since November. They had high

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marks for UNV Mike Sanderson and were grateful that UNHCR Representative Haile had visited the camp twice during her first three months in Ghana. Refugees noted that UNHCR was consulting more often with them, rather than attempting to impose solutions from on high. UNHCR thus appears to be winning the war for the hearts and minds of the refugees in Krisan, most of whom have eschewed violence in favor of dialogue and cooperation, perhaps due in part to upcoming prospects for third-country resettlement. UNHCR still has a tough sell on the Liberian repatriation issue; we will continue to share the message that we see Liberia as a country with a hopeful future and are redirecting the bulk of our Liberian refugee assistance efforts to returnees in that country.

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